

*The Success of the Gospel a Proof
of its Divine Authority.*

A
S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D

At the Cathedral Church of St. *PAUL*,
November the 2d. 1702.

B E I N G

The EIGHTH for the Year 1702. of the LECTURE
Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle, Esq;*

By *GEORGE STANHOPE, D. D.*
Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

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SERMON

PREACHED

At the Cathedral Church of St. Paul

Wednesday the 20th 1700

BEING

The Fourth of the Year of the Ministry
of the Honorable Robert Boyle Esq.

By GEORGE STANWORTH D.D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty

LONDON

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I
1 Cor. I. 25. latter part.

The Weakness of God is stronger than Men.

THE Word which we here render *Weakness* is manifestly used by St. Paul in a twofold Signification, sometimes for Sufferings and Afflictions, sometimes for accidental Infirmities, or Natural Defects. My Text includes them both, and in effect declares, that the Persons and Methods made choice of for propagating the Christian Faith, however despised by the Children of this World, were notwithstanding more for its Advantage, than any of those could have been, which They, who only look at Humane Means, would have thought most conducive to this purpose. And thus I am directly brought by the Passage before us, to my *Third* and Last General Head, *viz.*

III. That *The Success the Gospel met with in the World is an irrefragable Argument of its Doctrine coming from God.* In proof whereof, I shall set my self to consider how this Conclusion is warranted; *First*, By the Persecutions and Afflictions: and, *Secondly*, By the mean Condition, and natural Endowments of the first Planters of it.

Our Adversaries on this occasion seem to be agreed in thinking it reasonable, that, when Almighty God intended to establish a Religion which should Perfect and Superseede all that went before: A Religion, to which Men were bound to submit at their utmost
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peril,

peril, and to rest entirely upon it for their everlasting Happiness and Salvation: It hath I say, been thought reasonable to expect, that a Religion of so mighty and general Importance should have presented it self to the World in Circumstances the most inviting that could possibly be imagined: That this at least was a gracious and very seasonable Condescension to those Infirmities of Humane Nature, which are easily discouraged by any Hazards attending their Duty; and but too prone to decline a course of Discipline and severe Virtue, even at the cheapest rate, and with the greatest Security to their Fortunes and Persons. They therefore, who look no farther than Humane Nature, and Humane Means, may well enough be allow'd to lie under great Surprise; when they see the Foundations of a Religion, design'd to be universal, laid in the Disgrace of a Crucified Master, the Poverty and Simplicity of illiterate Publicans and Fishermen, and the Blood and Sufferings of the much greater part of Them, who, at its first setting out into the World, had the hardiness to embrace it upon such forbidding Terms. Nor were these Calamities unlookt for, or what Men found themselves trapann'd into; for, as the Scripture confesses Christianity to have been a *Seet* (a) *every where spoken against*, so the Conditions proposed by Christ and his Apostles, were expressly clogg'd with the Incumbrances of *Sufferings and Persecutions*, (b) *Hatred and Reviling*, and having even *their Good Evil spoken-of*, being brought before Rulers and Kings, clapped up in Prisons, treated with the most unnatural Treachery and Baseness, the most unrelenting Barbarity and Spight, Murder'd under the Notion of doing Service to God, and all this without so much as the pretence of any Crime,

(a) Acts
xxviii. 22.

(b) 2 Tim. iii.
12.
Mat. x. xxiv.
Luk. xvii. xxi.
John xvi. 2.

Crime, except that which was in truth their brightest Virtue, the Profession of, and stedfast Adherence to the Blessed Gospel of the Son of God.

With great Numbers of People this Treatment had the Effect that one would naturally look for. The Gospel thus became for some time to Most a Scandal and a Terror, to its Enemies a matter of Insult and Derision ; Many were discouraged from allowing it any part of their Consideration, and Some, who had confessed, but not sufficiently considered it, were too soon prevailed upon to forsake that Faith, upon the approach of Dangers and Losses, which, like *rash Builders* they had not computed the full Expence of, and so were not provided for sustaining. And in general it may be said, that, whatever Prejudices Men might conceive against this Doctrine upon Other Accounts, could not fail to make a much deeper Impression, when driven home by that Love of Ease, and the Tenderness for this World and its Comforts, which clings so close to Creatures of Flesh and Blood. Nor was it, humanely speaking, at all probable, that such Suggestions should be unsuccessful, when They, who undertook to perswade the being Deaf to them, did themselves minister new, instead of bearing down any former Prejudices. Their Character and Circumstances being so far from giving them Authority, as to expose them to the publick Scorn of all, whom Greatness and Riches, and Worldly Policy, and polite Learning had rendred eminent and in general Vogue ; or should dispose to scoff, and deride a handful of bold undertaking Men, who wanted all These, and yet were hardy enough to encounter, and reprove, and hope to subdue those who had them in the most exquisite Degree.

Such is the face of things, which I understand St. Paul to mean here by *the Weakness of God*; which though it might suffice to vindicate, if I should only put you in remembrance how much it hath in Fact been *stronger than Men*; yet my Design at present is to prove, that this Success is not only from God, but so worthy of him, as to be an unanswerable Evidence of the Doctrine thus succeeding; And that no other Method could have been more, I might say so effectual, to convince every sober and impartial Man of its being certainly Divine.

In order whereunto, I beg you to consider, *First*, the Service manifestly done to Christianity, by being established upon Persecutions particularly upon these following Accounts.

1. The firm Belief of its Doctrines.
2. The Union of its Professors. And,
3. The Power of it's Influence upon their Lives and Actions.

1. Its Doctrines were the more firmly believed by this manner of propagating them. For all Truth in general gains this considerable Advantage by being contradicted, and warmly withstood, that it is more thoroughly studied, more cautiously received, more vigorously and fairly vindicated. The great and common Corrupters of the Understanding are Credulity and Love of Ease. These make Men willing to take Things upon Trust; and even, in Affairs of the last Importance, such as their All, not in This only, but Another World depends upon, to think all well enough, while they keep the broad beaten Way, and believe as others believe. How infinite are the Numbers of ignorant Souls, whose Religion is not so much their Choice, as their Fate, or their Inheritance; And

of whose Principles no other Account can be given, than that, being born in a Country, and descending from Ancestors, which had these in Veneration, They likewise receive them, lest they should degenerate from their Families; and stick to them out of a false Modesty, which fears the being thought Singular, or affecting to be wiser than their Neighbours or Forefathers? 'Tis thus that Error oftentimes enlarges, as well as supports it's Dominions: Or, if by better chance such stumble upon Truth, yet is the Bottom they stand upon so sandy and unfaithful Ground, that we are not to wonder if the Building be shaken with every Blast of Doctrine. Such is the Mischief of taking the shortest Cut to an Opinion, and relying upon Custom, Example, or the Credit of Other Men's Judgments; rather than we will be at the Pains of travelling in search of Truth, and fixing our Minds upon a Rock by a diligent and due Information of Our Own.

This is plainly the Condition of too many Men's Belief: But then it is generally so, at such times, and in such points, as bring Priviledges and good Graces, and, instead of involving People in Trouble and Danger, are rather a Protection against them. This Evil therefore, as to Christianity, is of a later date, and grew up with the Peace and Prosperity of the Church. Heretofore, when all that the World esteems dear lay at stake, Men were content to move more circumspectly, and never grudged the trouble of seeing with their own Eyes. The Concern was then too tender, and the Risque too great to be ventured upon the Credit of any Judgment but their own. For when the Soul and all the Hopes of Heaven were to be weighed against the Safety of the Body, the Pleasures of Sense, and all the Advantages of the present Life; no
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question can be made, but good Care was taken, to see which side the Ballance would incline to. The Passions and Desires of the Natural Man, and the Enjoyments we daily tast and converse with, have indeed so strong an Influence upon every one of us, that it is no easy matter to determine against them. So that when Men were satisfied to Sacrifice These to Principles that forbid them to be indulged, and offer only Expectations of distant unseen Happiness, in lieu of Fruition down in Hand; this is a violent Presumption, that the Scale of Religion is incomparably the heavier and more substantial. For since all the Bribery of Sense, and all the Byas of Nature lie to draw us the other way; Nothing less than impartial Enquiry, and well weighed Resolution could prevail for vanquishing these, and pronouncing Sentence against so much Interest and Inclination. And consequently, God could not have consulted the Honour and Advantage of Truth more, than by ordering Matters so, that it should not for some time be possible for Men to retain This and their worldly Conveniences together. Because it was hereby evident, that the renouncing Those for the Truth's sake, could not proceed from any other Motive, than the overruling Power of This upon their Consciences and Understandings.

He must be very little acquainted with Mankind, who hath not observed, how obstinately we set our selves to disbelieve, and with what impatience we even hear those things that cross our Wishes, and our Profit. How we magnify every Shadow of an Argument, and form the strangest Prejudices in our Minds, that, in despite of Testimony and Experience, we may have some Pretence not to let go the Opinions we are fond of and accustom'd to. And if Men be thus fixed,

fixed, if almost inflexible, in Matters of less Moment, as we daily see they are; How can we think they would be less tenacious and stiff in those of the highest Concernment? How extravagant is it to suppose, that where Estate and Family, Honour and Safety, and Life it self were in Hazard, they should not do themselves the justice of presenting to their most serious Thoughts every Objection, and set each of these in the best Light, that the Case could possibly bear. Now never was there any occasion that called for such mature Deliberation, like the first embracing of Christianity. The Signs of God's Hand in the avowing this Religion were clear and strong, and his Voice to Mankind very loud and plain; But then the Inconvenience of complying was at the same time manifold, exceeding grievous, and as plainly unavoidable. If they came in, all here below was lost: And if the Gospel should at last prove an Imposture, then all hereafter was lost too: If they stood out, they had this Encouragement, that the Advantages of this World were still their own, which is a Consideration neither like, nor indeed fit to be neglected. And when the Choice would turn upon such Difficulties as these, we must conclude the Men that chose to be Christians to have been all stark mad; or else allow, that they certainly lookt well before them, and were entirely convinced that they went upon firm Ground, and an invincible perswasion of their Duty. And the more sensible they were of this, the more nicely, it is plain, must our Religion have been examined; And the greater Struggle they found before they surrendred to it, the more glorious were the Conquests it made over them.

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And, as the Truth would upon these Terms be more Cautiously received, so would it on the same Terms gain that other very considerable Advantage of being more Vigorously and Fairly vindicated. More vigorously, because when Men take up a Perswasion, without being able to give a good Reason for it; they are commonly as ready to quit it again, without being able to give a good Reason against it too. But a Belief resulting from mature Consideration, and chosen in despite of Danger and Discouragements, is prepared for any Difficulties that attack it. Not only so, but Men's Thoughts and Zeal are too apt to cool and grow remiss, even after the wisest Choice. There seems to be somewhat necessary to Goodness, which stagnates as it were for want of Motion, and asks a little Ruffling and Resistance to keep the ferment up. And this Opposition and Persecution effectually do; They fan our Devotion, sharpen our Wit, strengthen our Reflection, exert all our Powers, and give another Turn, a generous Air to all we Think, and Speak, and Do. We should not know our own Strength, and much less that of the Divine Grace working in and with us, were there perpetual Peace; nor could there be any Tryal of Sincerity, without somewhat of Danger and Suffering to call it into the Field. 'Twas thus therefore, that Almighty God chose to make our brightest Patterns so illustrious. The Malice of their Enemies was Instrumental in adding to their Honour; Their Slanders and Reproaches obliged Us, with the incomparable Piety and Pains, of Writings, which, if diligently studied, would qualify us to answer all the Objections of any Weight, that have been hitherto, or shall to the World's end be made against the *Faith once delivered to the Saints*. The rather, because to the same Causes
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we owe not the Vigour only, but the Fairness and Honesty too of all their Reasonings upon this Occasion. For though Men are exceeding apt to give us false Colours instead of solid Arguments; yet it is in behalf of profitable and convenient Notions only, that they set their Wits upon the Stretch. A persecuted Doctrine ministers no such Temptation. This can never shine by any Light but its own; And They, who take upon them to defend it at the Expence of all they have, may to be sure, if any Men living may, be depended upon for fair undesigned Argument, and a right stating of the Matter in debate. Thus much then suffice at present, for making you sensible of how great Service the Persecutions of the Apostles and Primitive Christians were to Religion, So far as the firm Belief of its Doctrines is concerned.

2. Nor was it a little Service which these Sufferings did, *Secondly*, by contributing to the Union of Christians among themselves, and a mutual good Correspondence throughout the Church in general. There is in corrupt Nature a restless Spirit of Envy and Emulation, which nothing so effectually composes, as the Feeling or the Fear of a common Enemy. And, since the Gospel does not undertake utterly to extirpate, but only to sweeten and reduce the Leaven in us; it was not to be expected, but the Seeds of Corruption would put forth, as proper Opportunities and Temptations should offer. But the afflicted State of the Church did in great measure cut off those Occasions, and furnished no Matter for such depraved Dispositions to feed upon. The Sense of perpetual Oppression, the Examples of infinite Tortures and Deaths, sustained for the same common Cause, the constant Expectation of their own Martyrdom, and the necessary

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sary Preparations for meeting it, as became Christians; These things preserved the tenderest Love and most compassionate Regard for one another; A Charity expressed by the readiest Supplies of all sorts, but especially of all Spiritual Comforts and Assistances: Which could not but be very large and fervent, when kindled and kept up by the Love and Grace of God, added to and enforcing those Endearments, which the being involved together in one Common Cause and Calamity uses to soften even Natural Men into. Add to all this, that there was then no Greatness to those of Inferiour Condition to Envy, no Preferments for Men unprovided to covet, no Popularity to affect, no Parties to be form'd or headed for Advantage: while the Higher Post was but the fairer Mark, and brought no Preference, except that of exposing the Person more eminently for the next Sacrifice to the Fury of the People, or the Barbarity of a Brutish Ruler, It was when the World crowded into the Church, and Christian was a Name of secular Priviledge, that Ambition and Avarice, Emulation and Contention disturbed the Peace, and deformed the Face of Christianity. Nor was Religion ever prostituted to Quarrels and Faction, till it was found worth while to make it a Trade, and of some Consequence to the Affairs of this World, to Tyrannize over, and tear, and destroy, and damn one another.

I do not think my self concerned, for the Support of this Argument, to dissemble those early Heresies that threatned this Religion in its Infancy. The *Gnosticks* in particular, and all that numerous Brood of Monsters, who did not only all corrupt, and many apostatize from, but some become the bitterest Persecutors of the Faith they once professed. But they only

only professed it, for St. John declares, *they went out from us, but they were not of us.* These Heresies therefore may be reckoned among the Persecutions of the Church; and, not now to repeat the Benefits which I have * formerly mentioned, as accruing to the Truth by their Means, what St. Paul says † is equally true of Both, *there must be such, that they which are approved might be made manifest.* God saw it necessary to permit them, that Men might be distinguished; This was the Test they were to be brought to, The Fire for proving which was true Silver, and which reprobate and Counterfeit. And hence again we may easily discern, why it was natural enough, that Peace and Unity in Doctrine and Affection should be the genuine Fruit of *Persecution*, because this proved Men thoroughly, and left no room for Hypocrisy. And, though it drove many off from Christianity indeed, and kept back more from coming into it, yet in all this the Truth was no Loser. God by this Method purged the Oar from the Dross; He sifted and winnowed his Wheat, but the Garner was never the poorer for this Separation. A Separation fit to be made, and yet not possible to be made without some violence: But still it swept off only the Chaff and the Refuse. And thus the Church of Christ lost none but such as added nothing to her, such as were not worthy to be got or kept; and the Glory of Religion does not consist in the Numbers, or the Bulk; but in the Goodness, the Sincerity, the Firmness, and tryed Virtue of them that profess to believe it. Which leads me to consider a *Third* Advantage arising from Persecution,

3. That of manifesting the Power of this Religion upon the Lives and Actions of its Professors. Of all the Perswasives, that conduced to the bringing in

* Lect. 1701.
Serm. iii.
† 1 Cor. ix. 19.

the World to Christ, it may be doubted, whether Any were more successful, than the Exemplary Piety and uncommon Virtues of those who had already given in their Names to him. Now, though such might be expected from the Principles of this Religion at any time, yet would Men be more especially quickned up to them, when sensible, that they were curiously watched by envious Eyes, that every Failing would be matter of Joy and Triumph, and give Countenance to that Malice and General Averfion, which waited for a plausible Pretence to ruine them; that they were loaded with the blackest Calumnies, which if not confuted by a Blameless and excellent Life, not their own Persons and private Reputation only, but even that of Religion, which they professed to hold dearer than their very Lives, must suffer greatly by any Blemish they should cast upon it. In this and the like Cases, I say, Men of Honour and Conscience would be exceeding careful to adorn and recommend their Faith, to reflect Lustre back upon it, to soften the fiercest of their Enemies, and win over those that should see the Shining of their Light, as well in living as dying for the Gospel. And this in Fact was so peculiar to the Times of Tribulation, that, as Peace and Prosperity, the Countenance of Great Men, and the Laws of Nations came over to the side of Christianity, much in the same Proportions did Sin and Security creep in, and the Piety and Prudent Conduct of Christians languish and decrease.

In the mean while Hardship and Suffering are the Test of a Man and his Principles: And therefore, when it pleased Almighty God to make our Great Leaders perfect this way, and leave us in Them so many Monuments of injured and impregnable Virtue,
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he consulted the Honour of his Gospel, and Signalized it more effectually, than seems possible to have been done, had his *Servants endured no contradiction of Sinners against themselves, nor ever been called to resist unto Blood* at all. For since the most refined Institutions before had furnished Men with remedies in their Troubles, however entertaining in the Speculation, yet short and feeble in the use; What could commend the Gospel more, than that its Principles furnish Holy Comforts and Supports, proved by such numberless Experiments to be more than sufficient for the utmost Difficulties and Distresses? That they assure Men of a Crown so much more Massive, as the Race for it is run with more of Sweat and Patience; and that its Rewards do by their Vastness and Eternity, make ample amends for being out of Sight and at a Distance from us: In a Word, that this Faith, and this only, could triumph over Malice and Disgrace, Prisons and Tortures and Death; not by Romantick Notions or a Frantick Zeal, but by *the Words of Truth and Soberness*; and could enable expiring Martyrs to make sometimes more Converts of Spectators, of Enemies, of their very Executioners, by their manner of dying, than their most laborious Preaching had gained through the whole Course of their Lives?

For 'tis to be observed, that the Influence of those Good Mens Sufferings would naturally differ according to the different Tempers of the Persons, under whose Consideration they fell. The Lovers of Pleasure and the present World, perverted with Lusts, and possessed with Prejudices, would let fall their Good Intentions upon this Account. But those of Probity and purer Minds would enter into another sort of Reflections. They would tell themselves, that
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Humour, or Deceit, or slight Persuasions, do not use to carry Men in their Wits thus far; and this would make them think it worth enquiring into the Reasons of such stedfast and amazing Perseverance. And thus again, if Christianity did not gain the Most, it would be sure to gain the Best of Mankind. A Conquest not only more valuable, but more lasting, than if its Beginnings had been prosperous, and the vertue of complying with it consequently less. For They, who (like the *Wise King* and *Builder* in the Parable) had sat down first, and truly computed the utmost of their Cost, and the Number of the Forces they had to encounter, and were contented notwithstanding to take Religion with all its Encumbrances; would not in likelihood desert it again. Because, however worldly Interests might change, yet Truth and not Interest was the Motive that brought Them in, and Truth is sure to be always the same.

If then the accurate Understanding, the deliberate Embracing, the Fair and Vigorous defending of any Doctrine; If the Unity and Good Correspondence, If the brightest Virtues, and most moving Examples shining forth, both in the Lives and Deaths of its Professors, be manifestly for its Advantage; then more I think needs not be said to prove, that the Persecutions and Sufferings of the Apostles and Primitive Christians, (which by the grace of God produced these Effects, contrary to the bent of Nature left to it self, yet very agreeable to the Dictates of Reason, directed and assisted from above) did greatly conduce to the Promotion and the Glory of the Christian Faith; and to the satisfying all considering People, that a Religion thus begun, improved,
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enlarged and made Universal, in despite of all Humane Opposition, was, could not but be, the Word and Work of God.

II. The same Conclusion, I am next to shew, does as evidently result from that *Second Signification* of *Weakness* in my Text, as it may reasonably be presumed to denote the despicable Condition, and very mean Endowments of the first Planters and Propagators of this Religion.

The Design of *St. Paul* in the Words, and of my Discourse from them, is to make it appear, that a just Consideration of the Christian Faith, and its Establishment in the World might have awakened other Notions in Men's Minds, and have induced them to think what they reproached as the *Foolishness* and *Weakness*, to be in truth *the Wisdom* and *the Power of God*. 'Tis true, it might so, and with Some it did so: But 'tis as true withal, that the Reasons inducing this perswasion were not very likely to be, as in fact they were not, fairly attended to by the Generality of Mankind. Of which there is this plain Account to be given, that the manner of revealing the Gospel left room for Cavil and Contradiction, and the Temper of People was fitted to take every possible Advantage against it. The Doctrines, though confirmed with Evidence sufficient to convince the Honest and Sincere, the Careful and Inquisitive, were yet never designed to enlighten the Negligent and Slothful, or to bear down the Obstinate and Prepossessed. And this was the mighty Hindrance, that Darkness was more acceptable than Light. For Vice and Corruption have this peculiar Mischief attending them, that they do not only infect and disorder Humane Nature,

Nature, but make us fond of our Disease. We hate our Physicians, and loath our Remedies, and take it unkindly to be cured. And so long as Lust and Passion, Ambition and Avarice, Envy and Revenge, Luxury and Love of the World are Predominant in our Hearts ; so long the Gospel must have irreconcilable Enemies, and be withstood with the utmost Inveteracy: Except God would change Man's Natural Constitution, and his constant Measures of acting, and, instead of perswading, compel them to their Duty.

He then, that shall seriously reflect, how general, how powerful these Prejudices are, cannot, I conceive, want much Pains to make him sensible, that no Authority less than Divine could suffice, I do not say to vanquish them ; Or that no Assistance less than Divine could render the Apostles successful in so bold an Encounter ; but that no Spirit less than Divine could give any Man the Courage to attempt it. Not These of any Men, who had no Character in the World, no Power or Greatness, no Education or Art to attract Admiration or Respect, or in any Degree to recommend the Doctrines they undertook to Preach. Not these Men, who knew they were to stem the Current of Natural Inclinations, and set themselves in Array against a whole World of Adversaries, by advancing not only new Articles of Belief, but very unpleasing and severe Commands in Matters of Practice. Not these Men, who were well apprised beforehand, what Censures and Reproaches, what Indignities and Barbarities they must undergo: what unavoidable Opposition from the Great and the Learned, the Busy and Turbulent, the Superstitious and Profane, for overthrowing Schemes of Religion of
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long Antiquity and universal Acceptance, fixed by Laws of Nations among the Heathen; and One among the Jews confessedly instituted by the true God himself. Not these Men, who by several Experiments had formerly discovered their own Infirmities and Fears, and that no People were more dispirited by the apprehension or approach of Danger. And therefore, when They, who were taken from their Boats and mending their Nets, *became Fishers of Men*; When They, who were *taken * notice of to be unlearned and ignorant*, apply themselves readily to People of all Countries in their own Languages; and attained in an Instant to a Perfection of Speaking, which the most capable and industrious never yet arrived at by the whole compass of a long Life's Study; When They who declined going into *Judea* with our Lord, because the Jews had sought to kill him; and All forsook him at the approach of a small band of Soldiers; and even after his Resurrection retired and shut their Doors to conceal their Assembling from their Enemies; When These Persons, I say, had the confidence shortly after to speak undauntedly before Synagogues, and Rulers, and Kings; to rejoyce in scourgings and Imprisonments, and meet and triumph over Death in its most frightful Shape: and even refuse a Deliverance from Racks, and Fires, and Crosses, when the shedding of their Blood might turn to account; This must needs be the Work of a Principle far above Nature: For what indeed less than the God of Nature could produce so amazing an Alteration in the Abilities and the Tempers, the Apprehensions and the Behaviour of Any, especially of such Men?

Acts iv. 13.

This for Themselves, and the Attempt it self;
Then for the wonderful Success of that Vigour they

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were inspired to make this combat with. The Measures for propagating Humane Inventions, and what the former ages of the World were wont to call Religion, were directly opposite to Theirs ; and yet the Methods were not more different, than were the Events that followed them. The Masters of other Learning and good Manners were carefully trained up to this Employment : They travelled into remote Countries, spent many Years in a long course of Study, and enriched their Minds with curious Observations : They applied their utmost Diligence to all the Arts of moving the Passions, such as might render them dextrous in perswading, and to set off their Matter with all possible Ornament and Eloquence : This procured them mighty Respect and Admiration, and made their Exhortations to be received like so many Oracles. But the Apostles came provided with none of these Advantages ; These rough unpolish'd Men were taken immediately from their Boats, and Seats for Receipt of Custom, to teach the sublimest Philosophy ; and they taught it in a manner suitable to their Condition, with unaffected Simplicity and the greatest plainness of Speech. They were rejected and despised, hated and slandered, Disgraced and Beaten publicly, exposed to popular Rage, as Wretches not fit to live upon the Earth ; and yet the most celebrated Philosophers, and yet the most accomplished Orators were not all of them together so powerful as One of the least of These. They enlightened Men's Understandings, convinced their Judgments, baffled whole Synagogues, struck an Awe into Courts of Judicature, confounded Gainsayers, charmed Enemies, converted Kingdoms, put Subtlety to silence, subdued and reformed a Corrupted World, and were the only Persons

sons, that ever triumphed over the Disadvantages of long-rooted Prepossessions, implacable Malice, and general Contempt. In despite of all these, and without any artful Insinuations, their Authority and commanding Influence was such, that their Followers were content not only to believe, but to Sacrifice their Estates, their Reputation, their Liberty, their Lives, and to stake down their Souls, their All upon the Credit of these new Masters. So amazing was Their Success, with so much less in all Humane Appearance to promise it. And, considering how extravagantly the Persons of Men are frequently admired, how their Greatness is feared, their eminent Parts and moving Rhetorick followed; and how blindly the grossest Errors, when thus recommended, are too often swallowed and submitted to; So happy was it for Religion, that its first Preachers had none of those false Charms, which use to seduce and captivate the Unwary. For being thus destitute of all Strength and Beauty, but that which is properly its own, and thus becoming Victorious; there can remain no doubt to what the Conquests it won are owing. Nor can such unparalleled, such deservedly surprising Events be ascribed with good Reason to any other Author or End, than those which St. Paul hath accounted for them by; when, in the Verses presently after my Text, affirming these things to be done by God, that *no Flesh* might have any manner of Pretence to *Glory in his Presence*, when the *confounding the Wise and the Mighty things of this World with Base, and Weak, and Foolish, and Despised Things*, and (as he most emphatically expresses it) *bringing to nought the things that are, with the things that are not*, was so entirely, so visibly his own Work.

And, as these Considerations prove it the Lord's doing, so do they prove no less the firm perswasion of its being so, in the Persons who were made his Instruments for effecting it. For, had they any Interests of their own in view, how easily might they have advanced or enriched themselves? If the Jews gave large Money to the Souldiers who guarded our Lord's Sepulchre, for saying, *his Disciples stole him away while they slept*, what Bounds, think you, would have been set to their impious Liberality, if the Disciples themselves could have been brought in to back that Evidence? And what should hinder them from doing it, at least from sitting still and not opposing it, had they not known the Doctrine they Preached to be not only infallibly true, but absolutely necessary to be believed and published at the Expence of all this World counts dear: Nay, and had they not been perfectly satisfied too, that, all the Dangers and Difficulties from without, all the Weaknesses and Imperfections from within notwithstanding, the Undertaking could not fail; since it was God's own Cause they were engaged in, upon whom they might safely depend, not only for a more exceeding and glorious Recompence of their own personal Sufferings, but for the Wisdom of his overruling Providence, to convert all the Opposition of Subtle and Malicious Adversaries, into an occasion of greater Honour and Triumph to that victorious Gospel, which storms, so many and so violent, did from every Quarter blow and beat upon, but blow and beat upon in vain?

For this in very Truth was the surprizing difference between the Christian, and all other Religions in the World. Those of Humane Institution, and even that of Divine among the Jews too, grew into Reverence by the help of Power, the Countenance
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of Authority, and the Encouragement of great Successes, confirming those who did already, and inviting others to embrace them. Nay, not content with these Advantages, they have too often and too scandalously betaken themselves to Methods of Rigour and Force, enslaved Men's Bodies first and then their Minds, and supported this double Tyranny by Fire and Sword. The Gospel, quite otherwise, was planted in Weakness and Disgrace, in Persecutions and Afflictions, in Tears, and Prayers, and Patience; It was watered with the Blood of many Thousands of its Professors; and the more Endeavours were applied to cut it down, or to root it out, the more it grew, and flourished prodigiously, and spread its Branches wider. And Humane Strength, without which other Schemes of Religion have not been able to subsist, contributed nothing to the Increase or Support of This, except then when with the utmost Vigour employ'd against it. So evidently was this Plant of our Heavenly Father's Planting, and therefore not to be plucked up; but when depressed, wounded, lopp'd, and maim'd, and torn perpetually in the principal of its Branches, and the choicest of its Fruit, still its growth was but the more prosperous and amazing; And all this, that it might be the more unquestionably proved to be from the *Excellency of a Power, which was of God and not of Men.*

Q In the mean while, I am very sensible, that Success is one of those Common-place Arguments, which is made much too free with by every Party, and for every Cause. And no body here needs be told, how frequently, how grossly, how impudently it hath been abused, with a Design to create in Men a Belief, that God approves those Actions and Designs, which,

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to demonstrate the Wisdom of his Providence, he is sometimes pleased to permit and prosper. The time will not suffer me to clear the Difficulties relating to this Point: Nor is it necessary; For whatever may be requisite in Other Cases, yet all I need to say in This comes within a very short Compass. For, though Men may too easily be mistaken themselves, or through unthinking Ignorance or wicked Industry lead others into Mistakes, by concluding from Success, where the Interests and Concurrence of Men are concerned in forming the Event; Yet there can be no room for a Fallacy of this Nature, in an Event and Design carried on and effected, not by the Help of, but without, and even in defiance and despite of all Humane Application. And therefore, when such a work is in no Degree Man's, but entirely God's own, as the Establishment of the Gospel hath been unquestionably shewn to be; we may be certain, (if we can be so of any thing) not only that God created this wonderful Work, but that he chose to do it with such Evidences of his Approbation and Delight, because he saw it was so very good.

Remember then, my Brethren, that as oft as ye profess and acknowledge your Obligation to the Doctrines and Precepts of the Gospel, This is the owning an Engagement, that hath the most rational and powerful Arguments in the World to strengthen it. 'Tis the avowing a Religion delivered by God himself in Scripture; A Religion, that is not, cannot with any Colour of Reason be suspected for the Contrivance of Artful and Designing Men; Not the Tyrannical and Arbitrary enslaving or ensnaring People's Consciences, but such as commands us to believe and practice agreeably to our best Judgment, and im-
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poses nothing upon Any, but what every Wise Man would impose upon himself, and every Impartial Man must needs be satisfied in the Truth and Evidence of, upon the same Terms, as he allows fit to give Satisfaction in Cases of the like Nature. A Religion, that is not, could not be the Work of Popular Fury or Faction, of Craft and Deceit, but which maintained the Combat with, and triumphed over the utmost Efforts these could make against it. A Religion not advanced or settled upon Prospect of Interest or Greatness, nor inculcated by Terror, or Awe, or Force; Not insinuated by false Disguises and fair Speeches; Nor entertained for Fear, or Gain, or Ease, or Pleasure; but One, that hath maintained a long and resolute Conflict against all these, and baffled them most shamefully. And by that Victory hath acquired to it self Immortal Renown, the Profoundest Reverence, and the most indisputable right to an universal Acknowledgment. For by this Success, thus obtained, it is exceeding manifest that God was for it; and that this made it signify so very little, Who, or What were or could be against it.

I have now gone through the several Heads at first propounded, for vindicating the Truth and Honour, the incomparable Excellence and Wisdom, and the certainly Divine Authority of the Christian Religion, against the Objections, which Ignorance or Inconsideration, Subtlety or Interest, Perverseness or Prepossession, Profaneness or Malice use to form against it. These have been considered, in a manner, though not altogether suitable to the Dignity of the Subject; (for Who not immediately inspired from above is capable of coming up to That?) though
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far short, I am sensible, of that Copiousness, which the Importunity of our Adversaries would seem to require, yet in such as God hath enabled, and the Limitation of my Superiours hath allowed Me Space for. And I hope, I may add too, such as, to sober and impartial Considerers, may answer the End of this pious Institution. Permit me only to conclude these Endeavours, with a few very plain and short Inferences; Some more immediately relating to the Point just now discussed, and Others to the matter of the Argument more at large.

I. *First* then, The Advantage, which Religion hath been shewed to receive from the Persecutions endured by the Primitive Christians, can be no good Reason, why we should not most earnestly pray for, and esteem the Peace and Prosperity of the Church, a Signal and most valuable Blessing. The different Dispensations of Providence in this kind have each their proper Seasons, and the Benefits resulting from each are to be measured by the present Condition and Exigences of the Persons to whom they are dispensed. As therefore such a general Opposition, and Difficulties insuperable to strength merely Humane, were at first necessary to prove the Gospel and its Progress an Institution and Effect truly Divine: So, when this Proof had been sufficiently made, it was no less necessary afterwards, that God should testify his Approbation of it, by such Marks of Favour as himself had promised, and as the Nature of the thing required. For this it did, when the State of Religion was so far confirmed, as to supersede all Occasion for the continued Operations of a miraculous Power, and left to subsist upon Ordinary Methods, seconded and succeeded by common Assurances. Had the Persecutions

tions of the Faith been perpetual, those Operations must have lost their End, For, what way should the World be satisfied, that this was God's Word, had it not flourished and prospered, and, through so many black and tedious Storms, reigned over Men's Hearts at last, in all the Glory and Tranquillity, which might appear a fit and ample Recompence for all the Hardships and Reproaches sustained in order to it? This Advantageous turn of Affairs is the Consideration of greatest force, in the Point we have been debating: That it should be brought to pass, and especially, by Means so seemingly contrary. But Persecutions taken by themselves, or the bare Preservation of the Faithful under them, might have tempted People to suspect, that God hated such Men and their Principles: and only kept them from perishing (like the race of the obstinate Jews) that they might be the constant Marks and Monuments of his Vengeance. So then upon the whole Matter, we may say, that had the Gospel never been persecuted, we could not so well have known that its Doctrines were not of Men; And, had it not been victorious and peaceable at last, we could not have certainly concluded that its Doctrines must needs be of God.

It is but too true, (which was observed in the foregoing part of this Discourse,) that the Piety and Union of Christians visibly decreased, as those Persecutions slackned. But This is no Direct and Natural, but an Accidental Consequence only of such a Change of Affairs; and therefore external Peace and Prosperity are not to be charged with it; nor must they be esteemed the less a Blessing, for the Abuses or Neglects, which the Corruption of Men's Hearts is the only true Cause of. These, like all other Mercies, are

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good and defireable, though capable of being made the Occasion of Evil. And generally speaking, it cannot be denied that (the Frailty and Weakness of Humane Nature considered) the Church is then most happy, when least exposed to severe and trying Afflictions. He therefore, who hath taught us to pray, that *Our Heavenly Father would not lead us into Temptation*, allows, nay teaches us, to prefer a calm undisturbed exercise and publick Encouragement of the true Religion, before those boisterous Storms, and deep Waters, in which, though the uncommon Skill and Courage of some Few may more eminently distinguish them, yet the much greater part of those embarked will run too great Hazards of making Shipwrack of Faith and a good Conscience.

2. As little ground is there, *Secondly*, from the first planting and propagation of this Gospel by the Ministry of Men illiterate and mean, to infer, that either the Advantages of acquired Learning, or those of a liberal Education and Fortune, are not fit or not profitable Helps to be employed in the Service of Religion. For whatever Colour some odd Arguers have imagined such Passages as this of my Text to give, for the keeping in Countenance their Ignorance or Enthusiasm, 'tis all a false varnish of their own; far from *St. Paul's* meaning, inconsistent with the Methods of God, even in those early Days, and much more with the reason of the thing, and the Condition of the Church in after Ages.

St. Paul indeed mentions the *Foolishness of Preaching*, but did he in good earnest think it so? No. He declares it more than Humane Wisdom. And therefore in such Expressions he speaks not his own Sense of it, but *Theirs* who, fond of the Subtlety and elaborate

borate Eloquence of their Own, held the Plainness and Simplicity of the Christian Teachers in utmost Contempt. It pleased God to begin this mighty Work by Men destitute of all acquired Advantages ; And by such only at the first ; To shew, that even These, when enlightned and assisted by this Almighty Spirit, were in the Power of that alone sufficient for the Mighty Undertaking. But was St. *Paul* the less a chosen Vessel, for being brought up at the Feet of *Gamaliel* ? Or did that Spirit disdain to have the Knowledge of his own inspiring mingled in Argument, against the Jews, with that Skill in the Law of *Moses*, which his extraordinary Proficiency in Their Schools had furnished, Or against the *Greeks*, with Testimonies of their own, though Heathen and Profane Poets ? Thus the Case stood, even when the miraculous Communications of the Holy Ghost ran highest : But, as they came in process of time to be abated or withdrawn, it was enough that Men of Letters had been converted by those of none : And then again, that these should employ their Talent against *Jews* and *Greeks* ; Attack them in the Way they admired and chiefly confided in, and be provided for the Weilding the Weapons of Learning and Humane Reason in combat with the most accomplished Masters. Thus we find it was with *Justin Martyr*, *Athenagoras*, and other early and eminent Apologists for the Christian Faith. And thus it ought to be ; that Industry and Study should supply the place of immediate Infusions. Nor could it be otherwise, unless we would suppose the Age of Miracles to continue to the end of the World ; Which, as it plainly contradicts Experience, so does it seem by no means to consist, either with the Wisdom of the Governour of the World, or with the use and end of Miracles themselves. In short, God

* Josh. v.

deals with *Israel after the Spirit*, as he did with *Israel after the Flesh*: Concerning whom the Scripture * gives us one remarkable *Specimen*, which, well observed and carefully applyed will be a rule to direct our Judgments in all the Dispensations of this kind. 'Tis, that though their Manna was daily showered from Heaven, during the Course of their long Sojourning in a barren and dry Wilderness; yet from *the day they eat of the old Corn of Canaan*; that is, when they enjoyed, and by their own Care and Tillage afterwards, were in a Capacity of providing themselves with common Sustenance, their feeding upon a daily Miracle ceased together with that necessity which called for it.

The same is to be said with regard to the Advantages of Fortune: Which were abundantly compensated by the Power of working Miracles: and such Evidences of the Divine Favour and Mission, as no worldly Preeminences can compare with. But when Christianity, as to its external Circumstances, came to be upon another Foot; it was for its Benefit and Dignity, that the Subsistence of its Preachers should be neither Poor nor altogether Precarious. And, though it were certainly a prudent and happy Provision, that among its first Believers not *many Wise Men after the Flesh*, not *many rich*, not *many Noble should be called*, yet no Man, in his Wits, I think, but must allow, that the more of these are now called, the better it is. For, however the former might be of greater Service to the Gospel in its Infancy, when it was to be supported by the immediate Interposition of an extraordinary Providence; yet in its adult State, when an ordinary Providence with Humane Helps would suffice, the Countenance and Examples of the Great and

and Honourable, and the protection of the Civil Power, as they would naturally contribute a great deal, so it is expected that they should contribute all they can, to the Security, the Honour, and the Advancement of that Truth, which it is more for their true Glory to be Professors and Promoters of, than all their earthly Grandeur can derive upon them.

These Inferences shall suffice to be deduced from the Present Discourse. Let me add but One or Two from those went before, and then I conclude.

I. *First* then, From what hath been delivered upon this Occasion, we are directed to make a right Judgment of that Doctrine, which contends, that all necessary Faith is resolved into this single Proposition, that *Jesus is the Messiah or Son of God*. Take this in its just Latitude, and the Truth of it cannot be disputed. But then so taken it will do no Service to Their Cause, who advance it, with a Design to exclude the Necessity of believing the Doctrines of the Trinity, the Divinity of the Son of God, and the Satisfaction for Sin, made by his meritorious Sufferings and Death. For what is it to believe Jesus the Messiah? Is it not to believe, that he in every respect filled that Character, and perfectly accomplished all those Promises, which the Prophecies and Types of the Old Testament had given Men reason to expect at his Appearance? Is not this the Natural Consequence of that very Scripture, from whence the Argument supporting that other Opinion seems chiefly to be inferred? The Baptism, I mean, of the Eunuch by * *Philip* * Acts viii. : The Grounds of whose Conversion the same Passage declares to have been laid in a right Understanding of *Isaiah's Fifty Third Chapter*, where the End and Benefits of the Messiah's Sufferings are fully and

and exactly described: And, though the Eunuch's Confession do not in so many Words express, yet, Can it reasonably be supposed, that he, who made a new Profelyte upon this very Topick, admitted him to Baptism, without knowing that Confession to imply, a stedfast Faith in those Sufferings so explained? To believe in the *Messiah* must at least import believing him a Teacher sent from God, and consequently a Belief of all, which either He delivered concerning himself, or Others sent by Him, acted and attested to by the same Spirit, were commissioned to deliver concerning him. And, if the Writers of the Books of the New Testament were all of them Persons of this Character, then must the Rule and Measure of our Faith extend to the whole of what they have left us about this Matter. Then either are those other Points, which the Christian Church hath used to require our Assent to, as a necessary Condition of Membership, not contained in Scripture; (which is an Issue we are well content to put the debate upon) Or else, He who believes *Jesus* to be the *Messiah*, believes him God of the same Nature with his Father, believes him to have died a Sacrifice for, and to have risen for the Justification of Sinners; believes his Mediatory Kingdom, and expects him as a Judge and Distributer of eternal Rewards and Punishments at the general Resurrection: In a word, believes all that he hath taught us concerning his Blessed Spirit, and the Powers and Priviledges with which he hath endued his Mystical Body the Church. Thus to believe him the *Messiah*, is a very comprehensive Proposition, and in this Sense 'tis a Summary of all necessary Faith. But to reduce those Terms to so narrow a Sense, as shall denote a mere Man, authorized by God in the Quality
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of the most eminent Prophet, and a Son of God by Office or Affection and Special Favour only; This is so far from that Faith which constitutes a Christian, that (notwithstanding any Preeminence above the rest which it hath been thought decent to complement him with) it seems to belong to every inspired Prophet, who taught and died in Confirmation of the Truth, no less than to *Jesus* of Nazareth himself. And therefore to propose this under such Restraints, as an Adequate Standard of a Christian's Belief, is but another Instance of that Sophistry, employed with so perverse a Subtlety, to elude the true purport of Scripture, in favour of those many pernicious Errors, which this pretended Rule is made use of to countenance and maintain.

2. It may not be amiss in the *Last* place, to warn the Weak and Unlearned, that they suffer not themselves to fall from their own Stedfastness, upon the Account of any bold Opposition, which they may see still made against the Doctrines I have been asserting. The Causes of a Liberty (Licentiousness rather) in striking at the very Fundamentals of Religion, in an Age and Country where in reason one would least expect it, I take not upon me to assign. Be this upon the Consciences of Them who Assume it to themselves, or who encourage, or connive at, or do not their part to prevent or suppress it: For of all these things God will surely require an account. What I intend at present is to cut off that specious pretence of new Discoveries and Arguments, by which the Men who lie in wait to deceive, labour to unsettle their too credulous Brethren. As if the Scriptures had never been rightly understood, till God, a Century or Two ago, raised up some boasted Lights;

as if the Principles so much decry'd by these Acute Doctors, and their Followers, had got and kept their Ground till then, merely through the Easiness and Ignorance of the Persons submitting blindly to them. It might suffice to beat down this Assurance to put you in Mind how very near the Modern are to a Transcript of the Antient Heresies: And that, though they vary a little in form and dress, yet their Substance is so much the same, that He, who hath digested the Confutations of the One, will find no mighty difficulty to detect and confound the Other. But that is not all I would say, For these mighty Expositors have descended yet lower, and do not disdain to *lick up the Vomit* even of Jews and Heathens and Apostates, and spit it out at Us. I ask no Pardon for an Expression, which St. Peter thought not unbecoming in a Case not much unlike this. For whosoever shall give himself the Pains of remarking the Slights and Subterfuges of *Celsus* and *Julian*, and especially of the Jews in their *Lipman's Nizachon*, *Chizuck Emunah*, *Porta Veritatis*, and several Conferences with *Christians*, will find many of the Principal Texts concerned in latter Controversies, evaded by the like artful Glosses in either Case. So that I have not stepp'd out of my way to meet them, nor swerved beyond the Lines set by the Honourable Founder of this Lecture, in answering Arguments urged by our avowed Adversaries; though taken up (unwittingly perhaps) by such as have excelled the first subtle Contrivers, in little else, but the matchless Confidence of putting upon us a sense of Scripture, professedly designed to overthrow the Faith of Christ, under the stile and boast of the only Just Interpreters, and most Orthodox Christians.

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Let no Man therefore beguile you with vain Words. All the defence Religion needs at present, is not from the weakness of its Cause, or the danger of new and more formidable Attacks, but from the unreasonable Clamours of its Adversaries: And from these, not because they cannot be answered, but because they will not be silenced. It pleased God in his Wisdom to suffer Men of ill Minds to use all possible Means of depraving the Truth, that Malice or Wit could invent, in times more capable of knowing what was indeed the Faith once delivered to the Saints: And a mercy it was, to have those Points so settled and discussed, before, not only a greater distance from the Fountain-Head, but the miserable Divisions of the Church since, had cut off the Opportunities of settling them, which We must otherwise have been left now to lament, and sit down under the want of. And therefore, as no place seems to be open for Objections perfectly fresh, so neither is there any unguarded, for those who stand on the defensive. But their Work seems in a manner ready done to their Hands. One Difficulty there may lie perhaps heavier upon Religion now than ever. A more Scandalous Dissoluteness in the lives of its Professors; And the same Spirit of Wantonness and Pride improved by a most unaccountable Levity and haughty Neglect about the most serious and sacred Things. But this is a difficulty of our making, and therefore not only may, but ought to be of our own removing too. And were it once removed effectually, Where might the Faith of Christ be expected to Shine with brighter Lustre than in Our *Sion*, and in our *Age*? For what more favourable Circumstances can concur to the producing so happy an Effect, than a Church so truly Primitive in her

Doctrine and Worship, a Governour so exemplary and zealous, and especially a God so exceeding Gracious in his wonderful good Providences towards Us. O that we may know in this our day the things that belong to our Peace, before they be (as otherwise they certainly will be) hidden from our Eyes. And therefore I cannot better close this whole Subject than with that short, but most Significant, and always (but never more) seasonable Collect, * Lord of all Power and

* Coll. for the
viiith Sunday
after Trinity.

Might, the Author and Giver of all good things, Graft in our Hearts the love of thy Name, Increase in us true Religion, Nourish us with all Goodness, and of thy great Mercy keep us in the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

F I I N I S.